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Grandmother's Secrets: The Ancient Rituals and Healing Power of Belly Dancing

Rosina Fawzia Al-Rawi
Interlink Books (March 1999)
Unknown $25.00 (158pp)
978-1-56656-302-4

> *Belly dancing, so aptly named, leads to the deep, dark cave, the center of the earth, before flying, in all its pride and life-force, up to the light, to inspiration, and to new awareness. The way to the spirit is found via the body, via the matter.*

With words fluidly chasing the literary face of an intangible essence—a fleeting silhouette veiled beneath music, dance and ritual—Al-Rawi cleverly reveals the secret of ancient Oriental dance, and revels in its mystery. Al-Rawi, an Arabic studies and ethnology authority, presents her impressions in this book that melds memoir, history and philosophy in an effort to capture and celebrate the timeless feminine spirit that is incarnated in dance.

Launching into a delicate web of dreamlike vignettes within the opening pages, Al-Rawi warmly draws readers into her childhood awakening to her culture and her place therein. Following these passages of personal inflection, she supplies a comprehensive, yet refreshingly concise history of cultural and ritual dance ranging from primitive to present day civilization. Concurrent with the tracing of this history is Al-Rawi's careful attention to the social and spiritual position of women in each successive era, as well as the specific influences of religion and economics. Al-Rawi discusses the ancient goddesses that once represented the Divine Feminine, the decline of ancient matriarchal times and ascension of the modern day patriarchal worldview. The inclusion of this analytical and philosophical retrospect is an unexpected and surprisingly powerful turn for the book. The author's lucid account of the shifting feminine role in society provides an effective springboard into the instructional balance of the book.

The book transforms again, becoming a guide to awareness of the body, in and out of motion, while outlining numerous techniques of dance. The inclusion of numerous photographs for posture and stance garnish the pages. The book may have, however, benefited from diagrams or a photo series to better illustrate movement. Well suited for a general audience in addition to cultural dance or women's studies enthusiasts, *Grandmother's Secrets* flows easily, untaxed by its serious undertone.

With the descriptions of ritual dances that mark a woman's life—her birth, womanhood, seduction and mourning—this book unveils a
commonality that transcends all cultures and offers hope. These women pass their lives gently, each one as a single day in the greater, endless lifetime of a collective spirit, dancing to a rhythm nearly circadian in nature.
KAREN WYCKOFF (June 15, 1999)

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